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Eastern Michigan University

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EMU Hosts MAC Cross-Division Foe Akron Sunday

Sunday, Jan. 26, 2014 » 2:06 p.m. » Convocation Center (8,784) » Ypsilanti, Mich.

EAGLES RETURN HOME FOR CROSS-DIVISIONAL CONTEST WITH AKRON: The Eastern Michigan University women's basketball team returns to Ypsilanti Sunday, Jan. 26, to take on the University of Akron in a 2 p.m. contest at the Convocation Center. EMU will show its support of the Women's Basketball Coaches Association (WBCA) breast cancer awareness and fundraising program, "Play4Kay" (formerly known as WBCA Pink Zone) by wearing pink in its contest against the Zips.

EMU, after losing Mid-American Conference contests at Buffalo and Bowling Green, enters the game with a 12-5 (2-4 MAC) record. Meanwhile, the Zips are 9-8 (3-3 MAC) after cruising past both Kent State and Ohio.

Veteran broadcasters Chad Bush and Greg Steiner will have the call on WEMU (89.1 FM) beginning at 1:50 p.m. Live video of the game can also be found on Eagle All-Access (subscription-based).

ALL-TIME AGAINST AKRON: The Jan. 26 contest against the University of Akron marks the 32nd meeting between the Zips and Eagles, who first met during the 1981-82 season. UA leads the series, 17-14. The teams met only once during the 2012-13 regular season when Rachel Tecca tossed one off the glass with just 0.7 seconds still showing to give Akron the 82-81 decision at James A. Rhodes Arena, Feb. 6, 2013.

This year's contest between the Zips and the Eagles could be much different than last year's match up. Last year, the Eagles were focused on the defensive side of the ball as they limited the opposition to just 62.1 points per game and scoring only 54.9 points per game, while Akron allowed 64.6 points per game and scored 75.6 points per game. This
season the Zips are averaging just 0.2 points per game more than the Eagles, as Eastern ranks third in the MAC behind the Zips with 81.2 points per game. However, the Eagles are limiting their opposition to 68.7 points per game, ranking second in the conference, while Akron is allowing opponents to score an average of 74.3 points per game.

**THE ZIPS AT A GLANCE:** Akron currently leads the MAC in four offensive categories as it sits atop the conference in free throw percentage (75.9), field goal percentage (44.9), assists per game (18.4) and assists to turnover ratio (1.2). The tandem of Hanna Luburgh and Rachel Tecca have accounted for 56.4 percent of Akron's points, as Luburgh has notched 391 (23.0 ppg) and Tecca has drained 390 (22.9 ppg) points in the Zips 17 contests. The duo is also a force on the boards as they pull down 39.8 percent of the teams total rebounds.

**WATKINS BECOMES PART OF THE 900 CLUB:** Senior Natachia Watkins notched her 903 career point Thursday, Jan. 23 at Bowling Green State University. Watkins currently ranks 22nd all-time in EMU laurels as she has played in 100 career contests.

Over the last 10 games, the South Euclid, Ohio native is averaging 11.8 points and 7.1 rebounds. During that stretch she has also reached double figures in points in seven games, including a season-best 21 point effort at Detroit, Dec. 15.

**TOP FRESHMEN SCORERS:** Janay Morton is one of just 15 freshman ranked nationally in the NCAA's top 250 scorers. The first-year players include: Chrishae Rowe, Oregon (21.5), Malia Tate-DeFreitas, Hampton (19.1), Kaela Davis, Georgia Tech(18.6), Larryn Brooks, Indiana (17.8), Sara Dickey, Evansville (17.4), Raven Bankston, Delaware St. (17.3), Kaylah Keys, High Point (17.0), Fanni Szabo, Dartmouth (16.9), Jessica Jackson, Arkansas (16.4), Diamond DeShields, North Carolina (16.1), Nia Coffey, Northwestern (15.6), Morton (15.1), Amanda Zahui B., Minnesota (15.0), Natalie Butler, Georgetown (14.9) and Leticia Romero, Kansas St. (14.6).

**STOP, THIEF!** With her three steals at Buffalo, Jan. 18, senior Desyree Thomas became the EMU all-time leader in steals in a career with 267. Thomas passed Ryan Coleman’s previous standard of 265 swipes which has stood since the 2006 campaign. The Mid-American Conference's active leader in steals, Thomas, ranks sixth nationally among current players in steals just ahead of Chrisstasia Walter of Louisiana Tech. Overall, Thomas’ total of 268 steals ranks 17th in league history. Toledo's Kim Knuth (1995-99) holds the MAC standard with 368 steals.

**SHE SHOOTS AND SCORES:** Freshman Janay Morton posted a career-high 34 points and seven three-pointers in the Eagles’ overtime loss at Buffalo, Jan. 18. Morton became part of an elite group, as she now ranks 15th in the EMU laurels for most points scored in a single contest. Her seven three-pointers also put her in a tie for fifth-most made in a single game, and are the most by an EMU student-athlete since Tavelyn James drained a record 10 treys against Kent State University, Feb. 11, 2012. Furthermore, her 63.6 percent (7-of-11) from beyond the arc ranks 12thbest in EMU history.

**LAST YEAR AGAINST AKRON:** Last season against the Zips, the Eagles lost a heartbreaker as Rachel Tecca tossed one off the glass with just 0.7 seconds still showing to give Akron the 82-81 decision at James A. Rhodes Arena, Feb. 6, 2013. Akron used a 50.8 field goal percentage to top EMU in the teams’ only meeting of the 2012-13 season as Carly Young led UA with 23 points. Tecca added 20 points to the Akron effort, while Hanna Luburgh and Taylor Ruper notched 11 points apiece.

Eastern posted a 50.0 field goal percentage and shot 45.5 percent from three point land, but was unable to secure the win as India Hairston drained a team-high 18 points. Natachia Watkins led all players on the glass as she grabbed 15 rebounds on the night and clinched a double-double with her 14 points. Four EMU players had a double-digit scoring effort as Hairston, Watkins, Desyree Thomas (14) and Bianca Cage (11) each contributed to the Eagle scoring. The Green and White tallied 17 points off of turnovers, eight of which were fastbreak points. The Eagles also used the inside game to their advantage as 56 of the teams 81 total points came in the paint.
EMU SUPPORTS PLAY4KAY BY WEARING PINK: EMU will show its support of the Women's Basketball Coaches Association (WBCA) breast cancer awareness and fundraising program, "Play4Kay" (formerly known as WBCA Pink Zone), Sunday, Jan. 26, in its home game against the University of Akron. Game time is scheduled for 2 p.m. at the Convocation Center.

The annual Play4Kay initiative provides coaches and student-athletes around the country the opportunity to "come together as one" to raise awareness for breast cancer research on the court, in their communities and beyond. Throughout February, high schools, universities and local organizations are dedicated to raise funds and awareness to support the Kay Yow Cancer Fund's (KYCF), mission of supporting scientific research focused on women's cancers, as well as projects assisting the underserved community.

YOUTH BEING SERVED: Heading into the 2013-14 campaign, Head Coach Tory Verdi knew he would be leading a very young team this season as the Eagles welcomed eight newcomers to the roster. In 17 games, the newcomers have combined for 54.8 percent (751 points) of the squad's offense.

SEEKING 20/20 VISION: One of Head Coach Tory Verdi's goals with the team's uptempo offense is to create more possessions and to put up 20-or-more shots than the opposition. The Eagles have accomplished that feat on four occasions, including taking a season-best 33 more shots than Marygrove, Nov. 30. The Eagles have been close to the goal in three other games, most recently taking 18 more field goal attempts than Buffalo, Jan. 18.

NORTHWEST OHIO COMES TO YPSI: Eastern Michigan has long had a history of pulling student-athletes from Northwest Ohio, but Head Coach Tory Verdi has taken it to a whole new level. The Eagles feature three products from the Toledo area including Olivia Fouty (Sylvania Northview), KaBria Walker (Toledo Rogers) and Cha Sweeney (Toledo Rogers). The three have combined for 30.3 percent of the team's rebound and 32.4 percent of its offense.

HOME COURT ADVANTAGE: The Eagles have won 45 of the last 65 home games dating back to the 2008-09 campaign. Eastern Michigan has racked up a solid home court advantage inside the friendly confines of the Convocation Center since the doors opened during the 1998-99 campaign. The Green and White has won 68.5 percent of the contests played in the building, piling up a 139-64 all-time mark.

EMU QUICK HITTERS: The Eagles surpassed their entire win total from the 2012-13 season in just nine games ... The Eagles are out scoring opponents by 22.4 points in victories ... Eight of the Eagles' 12 victories this season have come by double figures ... EMU and Toledo are the only teams in the league that feature four players that average double figures in points.

LEADING THE MAC: The Eagles sit atop the Mid-American Conference in steals as the Eagles have taken the ball 67 times from their opponents, averaging 11.2 steals per game. The Green and White ranks in the top-five in four other categories.